BENGAL PLANTERS AND RYOTS

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B. B. R. A. S.

BOMBAY BRANCH
OF THE
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HODGSON PRATT.

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WHATEVER view may be taken of the change in the administration of Indian affairs, which is described as the substitution of the government of the Crown for that of the Company, one thing is quite clear,—it has made the English people directly responsible for the good government of India. As regards the mere internal administration of that empire, the old Court of Directors was in point of fact supreme. Any effective interference on the part of the Board of Control was pretty well confined to external affairs, our political relations with the native powers, and so on. By the abolition of the Company, whatever power is exercised in England in regard to the internal administration of India is in the hands of the Secretary of State. Sir Charles Wood loses no opportunity of reminding the public that his Council are merely persons who supply him with information, and are not in any way to share with him the office of government. The Secretary of State, then, wields all the authority of the East India Company, but, unlike that body, he is directly responsible to the Crown and the people of England for the mode in which he administers his authority.

It rests, however, with the Parliament and the people to enforce this responsibility. If they have no opinions, and express no opinions on Indian affairs, the secretary becomes in fact an irresponsible ruler. To make him so, would be a gross dereliction of duty on our part; and any misgovernment and injustice arising out of his irresponsibility would be the direct result of our ignorance and neglect. And we may be quite sure that any misgovernment of India will not only affect the welfare of the 170,000,000 who people that empire, but will affect our welfare also. It may be nothing to some persons whether our Indian fellow-subjects are the worse or the better for our rule, and there is a disposition in some quarters to talk as if India were only a source of difficulty and anxiety without being a profit to us. It is forgotten sometimes that our Indian trade is worth ninety

millions a year; that we get eight millions a year of direct tribute in the shape of remittances; that nearly half our army is supported by India; and that our higher middle class finds an invaluable field for livelihood in civil, military, planting, mercantile, and engineering employments. There we have an argument for keeping an eye on the government of India which will have its weight with the least sentimental and the most selfish. We should like to teach such persons that the most direct and immediate means of getting profit out of a country is not always the most certain or the most lasting; and that justice to the people of a conquered country—nay, large benevolence and patient consideration—pay better in the end than any other policy.

As a contribution towards such instruction, we desire to call attention to a social revolution which has been going on during the last three years in our oldest Indian possession,—the districts of Lower Bengal. In the course of this movement, almost every great Indian question has been at issue—the relations between the natives and our English settlers and planters, the relations between the latter and the Indian Government and officials, the relative position of the cultivators and their so-called landlords, and the extension of European enterprise in India. Nearly all that has reached the English ear in regard to this "Indigo question" consists of certain angry recriminations between the Bengal Government and the planters, a few hurried and half-intelligible conversations in Parliament, and some correspondence in the *Times* about a Bengali drama called the *Nil Durpan*, or "Indigo Mirror." We wish now to sketch out the true history of the events which have been taking place, and to indicate the conclusions which we may legitimately derive therefrom.

It will, however, be hopeless to make the real nature of the case intelligible to English readers without a few preliminary remarks on that most distasteful and repellent of all topics—the nature of Indian tenures. But the thing is much simpler than people generally suppose, so long as small details are avoided, and merely the general outline looked at. There is no doubt whatever that by the ancient law of India the ownership of the soil was vested in the cultivators, subject, however, to the payment of a tax to the sovereign. This tax was collected by a village-chief elected by the villagers or ryots. A certain number of villages were comprised in a district, and over the district was a district-chief, who received the land-tax, and paid it in to the fiscal officers of the sovereign. These officers, or "tax-collectors," became in time hereditary. The Mohammedan conquerors did not interfere with them, but changed their Hindoo designation to the Mohammedan one of "Zemindar." Gradually

there grew up the oppressive system of farming taxes. A large division of the country was assessed, haphazard, at a certain sum, and farmed out to a Talookdar, who was to collect what he could squeeze out of the zemindars, who in their turn squeezed what they could out of some other middleman, and he out of the tenant-proprietors, or ryots. We took this system with the country, and carried it on with increasing confusion and oppression, until Lord Cornwallis introduced his celebrated "Perpetual Settlement" in 1793. Of course neither he nor any other Englishman had any accurate knowledge of Indian tenures; and it was not the interest of the native middlemen and tax-farmers that they should. Because land in England belonged to a class of landed proprietors, of whom the agricultural population held as tenants, it was presumed that the tenure in India must be the same. Lord Cornwallis was determined to put an end to the oppressive farming system by assessing the different divisions of the country at some fixed rate *for ever*, and by making this settlement with the persons who he supposed were the *landlords* of these divisions. He took it for granted that the hereditary tax-collectors were the landlords, and accordingly this Perpetual Settlement was made with them, and the proprietary rights of the ryots were almost entirely ignored. We say "almost," for there was a suspicion in some minds that all was not quite right, and accordingly words were inserted in the Settlement law providing for the future enactment of such measures as might be found necessary "for the protection of the ryots and other cultivators of the soil."

The result of this dreadful blunder was the gradual degradation of the ryot class to a state of poverty, helplessness, and oppression, which is only too notorious. We limited the tax upon the zemindar, but we took no precaution to limit his demand upon the ryots. Their tenure had always been that of holding their lands for ever, either at permanently fixed rates, or at the rate of the district, and so long as they paid what was due by the nature of their tenure, they could not be ousted. But the power we put into the hands of the zemindars enabled them to trample upon the rights of the tenant-proprietary, and to resort to the imposition of increased charges of all kinds. This, however, was not all: the zemindars, to save themselves the trouble of managing their estates, or to meet difficulties caused by extravagance, gradually acquired the habit of assigning for ever, at a fixed rent, to any one wanting land, portions of their estates, in consideration of a handsome *bonus*. They remained responsible to the Government for the total amount assessed on their estates, but could sell up the under-holders if the latter failed to pay their rent. These under-holders were called *Putnee Talook-*

dars. This tenure should be borne in mind, for many English indigo planters at the present day hold their position by virtue of it. The putneedar takes the position of the zemindar as regards manorial authority and the right to the ryots' rents, in so much of the original estate as is thus made over to him. But as he has to pay the zemindar the same income that the latter had been receiving directly from the ryots, the only way in which he could benefit by the transaction was by increasing the amount of the rents derivable from the ryots. Very often he appointed an under-holder, or sub-putneedar, under him, and this latter a sub-sub-putneedar under him; and as each new middleman required his own profit, each transaction resulted in an additional turn of the screw upon the miserable down-trodden ryot, the original and real proprietor of the soil!

By degrees, however, the Indian Government became alive to the dreadful injustice which had been done; and attempts were at various times made to protect the ryots against further encroachments. It was ruled, that if any man could show he had held a proprietary tenure for more than twelve years before 1793, his rent should not be liable to increase; and he could sell, sublet, or mortgage such lands, like any other proprietor. But in the vast majority of cases the documents which could prove the ryot's tenure had been lost or destroyed.

Still, there are thousands of ryots in Bengal whose right of occupancy at a fixed rent has been undisturbed; and if their zemindar or putneedar wants a piece of land in his own (so called) estate to build a house or factory, he has to *buy it* from the ryots occupying the land. And at length, in 1859, the Government of India passed a law, which has been rightly called the "Ryots' Charter," being as full a recognition of their long-neglected rights as was compatible with good faith towards the zemindar, and the terms of the enactment of 1793. By Act X. of 1859 it is provided that "every ryot who, by himself or by the person from whom he inherits, has cultivated land for twelve years, has a right of occupancy in that land, so long as he pays the rent *payable* for the same." That rent may be a fixed rent, or it may be the rate of the district. Another Act provides that a ryot's rent, if liable to be raised by the custom of the district, or by the nature of his tenure, shall not be raised arbitrarily, but only according to certain prescribed rules, or on a regular suit. Act X. of 1859 conferred another boon upon the ryots. On the plea of its being necessary, to enable the zemindar to collect his rents from defaulting tenants, he had the power of requiring their attendance at his rent-office whenever he considered it necessary. This led to the grossest abuse. Whenever the zemindar wanted to exact increased rents, or some illegal exaction

on the score of a marriage or a birth in his family, or whenever his agents wanted a present or fee for themselves, or whenever an indigo planter wanted to make the cultivators enter into engagements to grow indigo, the ryot was, under the above plea, dragged to the rent-office, perhaps several miles from his village, locked up without food, or beaten or bullied in some way, until he had done or paid what was required of him. By the new law, this opportunity of intimidation, torture, and oppression, was put an end to, by abolishing the right of the zemindar or putneedar to enforce the ryot's attendance at his office. Both the clause securing him against these outrages, and that securing to him his rights of tenure, have been stigmatized by a party among the indigo planters as a gross interference with proprietary rights, and as an obstacle purposely thrown by the Indian Government in the way of European settlers!

Whether the independence and prosperity of the ryots, yeomanry, and tenant-proprietors of Lower Bengal are incompatible with the prosperity of the English planter or settler remains to be seen. We do not believe it is; but whether it is or not, we are bound to take care that the plain and obvious rights of the native population are not overridden to suit the convenience or promote the wealth of our own countrymen. No doubt the sudden collapse of the system of indigo planting, as pursued in Lower Bengal, is in some measure owing to the newly-recovered rights of the native owner of the soil; but that, surely, is no reason for withholding those rights. The planters as well as the zemindars owe much of their wealth and prosperity to the acts of injustice and ignorance which we committed when we first came into possession of the country. To do justice now to the long-oppressed millions who cultivate the soil of this fertile land involves changes of some magnitude, and all such changes involve temporary hardship to individuals. It is in the nature of things that such persons should take but a very narrow, incorrect, and selfish view of the question at issue. But as neither the views and interests of slaveholders in the West Indies, nor of corn-law protected landlords in England, were allowed to interfere with the course of justice, right, and true policy, so the planters and zemindars of Bengal cannot be allowed to interfere with legislation and policy so moderate and just as that now initiated by the Indian Government. The class, however, whose interests will temporarily suffer has the power of raising a pretty loud cry in this country, and of misleading the public here as to the true state of things. It is to warn the public against such one-sided representations that we have brought the dispute before them in the present article.

To sum up our remarks on Bengal land-tenures, there are,

then, four parties who have an interest in the land: 1st, the State, which has a right to tax the land, and to resume any estate of which the holder fails to pay the tax due upon it; 2d, the zemindar or "rent-lord," possessing many of the manorial rights which a landlord possesses in this country; 3d, the class of under-holders, or Putnee talookdars, who hold portions of the parent estate for ever at a fixed rent, and can sell or sublet the same; and 4th, the tenant-proprietors, or hereditary ryots, holding at a fixed rent, or at a rent liable to be increased according to certain determinate rules,—and under them come the actual cultivators, labourers, or tenants-at-will.

We will now enter upon the history of the recent indigo disturbances, and endeavour to show what were the real questions at issue. It would be a great mistake to suppose that indigo cultivation has only recently become a source of contention between the English planters and the natives. As the Lieutenant-Governer, Mr. J. P. Grant, says in a recent Minute, "While in all other trades all parties concerned have been bound together by the usual commercial ties of mutual interest, in this one trade, in this one province, the indigo manufacture has *always* been a remarkable exception." So long ago as 1810 the Governor-General was obliged to issue orders to the magistrates on the subject of the "habit" which indigo planters had then, as now, of compelling ryots against their will to enter into engagements to sow indigo; and four planters were in that year expelled from India for the gross ill-usage of the natives of which they had been guilty. The eminent missionary, Dr. Duff, says that, twenty years ago, he found secret murmuring and discontent among the people on this subject. The Rev. Mr. Long, who has made native literature a profound and special study, says that for the last sixteen years indigo planting has been the subject of incessant attacks in the native press. The Rev. J. Cuthbert, another missionary, says that several years ago he learnt that the ryots were in a state of extreme irritation against the planters, and ready to break out at any moment. Other missionaries, knowing more of the real state of the native mind than officials and planters, surrounded by a veil of interested and corrupt subordinates, declared that when they began to preach in the villages the people asked, "Is your religion that of the indigo sahibs? for if it is, we will have nothing to do with it, on account of the misery they inflict on us."

In every shape this feeling between the planters, the ryots, and the zemindars was cropping up from time to time. Breaches of the public peace, violent affrays, the assembling of armed bands by rival planters and zemindars, the forcible plunder of cattle, burning of houses, and kidnapping of recusant ryots, were

constantly taking place in connection with this one particular cultivation. If violent disturbances and affrays, accompanied with wounding and murder, have been less frequent of late years, it is because the planters have by degrees beaten or bought all rivals out of the field. Once they were few and scattered, and the rivals of each other; now they are many, and combined in a sort of league. Once they were dependent upon short leases from zemindars, who often assigned them villages which they had either already leased to somebody else, or which were not theirs at all; a dilemma which few and distant tribunals, dilatory procedure, intricate tenures, and an infamous police, made it more convenient to settle by a good stand-up fight. Now the planters are themselves zemindars, or, which for their purpose is the same thing, putneedars. In those days, when an English "adventurer" wanted to make his fortune in the blue dye, he rented or bought a piece of land from the zemindar on which to erect a house and factory. He next hired a number of factory servants (often discharged land-agents, and men of indifferent character), whose business was to get as many of the neighbouring ryots as possible to enter into engagements to grow indigo. They would receive mere nominal salaries, but would remunerate themselves by a commission on all advances paid to the ryots, by douceurs, and various kinds of extortion. In the condition to which the peasantry were reduced by the circumstances described at the commencement of this article, they were necessarily always in debt, and for some months before the harvest utterly destitute of money to buy food. So the planters' servants wait until this time comes round to tempt them with an advance of cash, if they will engage to grow indigo. At any other time of the year they know the ryot would refuse the bait. He is anxious to avoid the engagement, partly because the success of the crop is excessively precarious, and partly because when a ryot is once on a planter's books, the latter will never let him clear off his balance, no matter what indigo he brings; and so long as the balance is against him, he must go on cultivating indigo, even for the rest of his life; for he will get deeper and deeper in debt to the planter year by year, while all the time he could grow other crops more profitably. He knows that his best land will be taken for the hated crop, and that the planter will always be sending people to see that he weeds it and cultivates it properly; and he knows that any neglect on his part will probably be followed by his being dragged miles off to the factory to be locked up in a barn, if not beaten. He knows that the planter's servants will constantly be coming to him for presents, with the threat that if he does not come down handsomely they will have him taken to the factory. Notwithstanding this

prospect, he cannot resist the bright rupees shining in the tempter's dark palm, and he gets a nominal advance of four shillings for every beegah* he undertakes to sow with indigo; but before the money touches his hand a deduction of one-fourth or more of the amount is made by the agent as his recognized perquisite.

When the ryot delivers the plant at harvest-time, he is credited with two shillings for every four, six, or eight bundles, according to the fixed and customary price given by the particular factory, and not according to any market value. Moreover, the bundles are measured by a chain, which the factory servants are in the habit of stretching so as to measure much or little, as the ryot bribes them liberally or not. Then the plant is put into vats and manufactured into dye; after which each ryot's account is adjusted. To his debit are set down the advances, the value of the stamp on which his contract was made (though the contract is nothing but a blank paper!), a charge for seed (generally supplied to the ryot at less than its value), the expense of carrying the plant to the factory, and the amount of any previous debt. To his credit is set down what the factory servants choose to estimate as the value of his crop, and a balance is struck. Probably he has nothing to receive at all; perhaps the balance is against him and goes to swell the debt already due from him on account of previous years of bad crops and short price. If the ryot has any excess to receive, it is paid, *and something more*, in order that he may not be able to clear his account. It would never do to let him clear his account, for then he would not sow again next year; and as long as he remains a debtor to the factory he must continue to sow. Next year he receives an advance again, partly consisting of cash, partly of *unliquidated balances*, that is to say, he receives an advance of four shillings per beegah, with a deduction proportionate to his debt. Now, of many evils connected with this system, the one which has exasperated the ryot most is the irremediable and permanent state of debt into which he is thus thrown.

So long as the ryots were subject to their own native zemindars, they could set the planters at defiance. The latter, therefore, seek to become zemindars themselves. They found many zemindars who, as we have explained, to save themselves trouble or to meet temporary difficulties, were glad enough to settle portions of their estates on anybody who would pay a large sum down for the privilege. By this means no less than three hundred and thirty-five Europeans have obtained estates in Lower Bengal, and, with them, all the customary, though illegal,

* One-third of an acre.

privileges and powers of zemindars. Ryots who could refuse with impunity to enter into engagements to sow indigo, while they were independent of the planter, could no longer do so when he became the zemindar or putnedar of the estate in which their villages and homes were situated.

The oppression of the ryots by the native zemindars was bad enough, but the latter were their own countrymen, and not strangers and aliens; and in India "the lower orders will endure patiently at the hands of one of their own colour or creed ten times the oppression which they would at the hands of a foreigner."* Their own countrymen, however, never forced upon them the cultivation of a losing crop to the extent the foreigner has done. English readers will ask whether this oppression is well proved. It was not denied by the planters themselves, in evidence before the recent commission of inquiry. From their own lips we learn that, to intimidate the ryots into making engagements to sow indigo, their cattle are *very frequently* seized, and that it is a *common occurrence* to kidnap the ryots themselves and confine them in the factories, sometimes for many weeks at a time! There is undeniable evidence that occasionally houses are burned down or demolished, and fruit-gardens dug up, with the same object. A long list of outrages which have come before the courts is given in an appendix to the Report of the Indigo Commission, and we select one or two of the headings at random:— "This village was attacked, plundered, and burned, because the ryots would not sow indigo for Mr. F——; the attack was made in the presence and in defiance of the police. Twenty or thirty of Mr. F.'s servants were imprisoned for five years. Mr. F. was not tried." Again: "The factory servants seized and drove off a number of cattle engaged in ploughing for the zemindar, the zemindar's servants endeavouring to rescue them. One man on the part of the zemindar was killed by several spear-wounds; the cattle were found in Mr. T.'s factories. One of the servants was sentenced to fourteen years' imprisonment, and the rest to five years. Mr. T. was not tried." Many of these cases end with these words: "Mr. —— (the planter) was not tried." The meaning of this we will explain. A British-born subject not being liable to trial for heinous offences before the local courts, the case would have to be sent to Calcutta, perhaps two hundred miles distant. This of course involves infinite distress to the native prosecutors and witnesses, who would rather run away and hide themselves than undergo the penalty of having to leave their homes for a period of several weeks, and make a long journey on foot in such a climate, and then to wait

* Report of Indigo Commission.

for the trial in a strange city at great expense. On the other hand, the magistrate, unless the evidence is very strong indeed, feels considerable hesitation in exposing the plaintiff's witnesses to all this. The chances are that the jury of English shopkeepers in Calcutta, having an entire disbelief of native evidence, will refuse to return a true bill. We mention this to show how great an impunity English planters in the interior have been in the habit of enjoying, and how much that impunity must have enabled them to force the ryots into indigo contracts against their will. We should be sorry to say that all, or even the majority, of the planters are guilty of the grosser kinds of oppression and acts of violence; but when we find that they are in a position to do so with impunity, when oppression of the weak by the strong, of the ryot by the zemindar, is the tradition of the country, a ryot always expects oppression unless he yields, and can therefore be compelled by a mere "order" to do what is wanted. If planter A does not proceed to acts of violence, planter B does, and so the tradition is kept up.

We have thus shown that the pressure upon the ryot became intolerable when the planters everywhere obtained the power and position of zemindars for the sole purpose of more effectually coercing the ryots into indigo cultivation.

But within the last three years another thing happened which brought matters to a crisis. All agricultural produce rose in value to double its former price. What, then, must have been the feelings of the ryots, in their hand-to-mouth poverty, when they found themselves deprived to a great extent of the golden prospect which thus opened to them? Here was a chance of their being at last able to redeem themselves from debt and misery, but for the necessity of cultivating their best land with a crop which was a dead loss, instead of with crops which would have brought them enormous gains. After being for half a century the slaves of the village money-lenders, to whom their crops were mortgaged before they were ripe, and of whom they were glad to borrow at fifty per cent., or even more, there was now a chance of their becoming independent, of being able to lay by money, and of entering upon the path of steady progress, wealth, and improvement. It is important, therefore, to estimate the exact extent to which the cultivation of indigo is unprofitable to the ryot, adding the amount of his loss on the indigo, at the price given by the planter, to his loss of the profit he would have made by any other crop on the land abstracted for indigo. Mr. J. P. Grant, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, in his Minute on the Indigo Commission, shows that the ryot loses fourteen shillings a beegah, equivalent at the least to seven times the rent of the land.

"Now, if one remembers," Mr. Grant says, "that these ryots are not Carolina slaves, but the free yeomanry of this country, and, indeed, strictly speaking, the virtual owners of the greater part of the land in the old cultivated parts of Bengal, so heavy a loss as this will fully account to us for the strength of the opposition to indigo cultivation which we have just experienced. One-sixteenth of his whole land is a common proportion which, it is insisted, an indigo ryot shall sow in indigo. This is as though a farmer in Great Britain, farming under a long lease 160 acres of land, at a rent of two pounds an acre, were by some sort of pressure forced to cultivate ten acres, say in flax, which he was compelled to sell to a certain neighbouring manufacturer at a dead loss of 140*l.* a year."

Englishmen at home will be unable to comprehend how any number of their countrymen could be guilty of conduct so discreditable to their nation and their religious faith. But the binding nature of self-interest must be remembered. To repeat an illustration we have already used, West-India planters could see no injustice in slavery, or English landlords in a law for dear bread.

An Englishman goes to India, and from the first moment of his arrival he hears of nothing but the knavery, idleness, and treachery of the native character. He is told that the peasantry are so accustomed to force, that they will do no work without it, and that he will be plundered by them if he does not put the screw on. His native servants, interested as they are in the system, persuade him that it is for the good of the people themselves that they should grow indigo; that they are so indolent, they would starve unless compelled to labour; that the native zemindars oppress them so intolerably, that it is quite a relief to them to put themselves under the planter. Then comes a mixture of truth. The young planter is assured that the ryots derive much advantage, because they get advances without the interest at fifty per cent. charged by the village money-lender; stress is laid upon the amount of money spent in the neighbourhood by the factory, and upon the increase of cultivation which has followed its establishment. But the strongest argument of all is, that, without force, the ryots will not grow the plant at the price the sahib gives, and that if he pays a higher price, the speculation will not pay. It must be remembered that there are few factories carried on by the planters' own capital. They are worked by money borrowed from English houses in Calcutta, at enormous interest. The planters pay ten per cent. on the amount borrowed for the block, and the same on the amount remitted for the annual outlay, besides brokerage and commission to various parties in Calcutta. On the whole, there is from seventeen to twenty per cent. to be defrayed from the proceeds in this shape, besides the interest on the capital raised for the factory-buildings, etc. And it must be remembered, that a large proportion of the planters are merely the agents of mercantile houses in Calcutta, and are held responsible only for the out-turn, not for the mode

in which it is effected. No doubt, under such a system, the ignorant, degraded, oppressed, and cowardly population of Lower Bengal have resorted to the only weapon of defence left them, infinite cunning and chicanery. And the evidence shows that the faults of native character are all intensified by the presence of an indigo factory. It is too bad, then, to make those very faults an excuse for conduct which necessarily and naturally increases them, and makes a once free class of yeomen little better than degraded and dishonest serfs. No doubt, however, the injury done to them is not less than the injury to their taskmasters. Slavery is as great a curse to the driver as it is to the driven.

But is all indigo cultivation in India carried on in this way? Are all planters guilty of such wrong-doing? Certainly not. It has been the interest of those interested in this system, the planters and their supporters in Calcutta, the merchants and brokers, to raise a cry in the *Times* that a trade worth two millions is in jeopardy, because the Government have refused to assist in bolstering up the system. But out of thirty-five districts in Lower Bengal, there are only five in which difficulties of this nature have arisen. In Madras, in the Upper Provinces, in many districts of Lower Bengal itself, there has been no difficulty whatever. At the most, only fourteen per cent. of the whole indigo trade of India has been in jeopardy. The simple reason is, that everywhere else other and better systems of obtaining a supply from the native cultivators has prevailed. Even in the disturbed districts there are two systems, to one of which only our remarks apply.

These various systems may be classified under two main heads. There is first the "neej," or "own," system, where the planter is really a planter, and not a mere manufacturer, and where he carries on indigo cultivation by hired labour on lands which are *his own*,—a "home-farm," in fact. This system has not been followed more generally than it is for various reasons; one, that in many districts it is difficult to get land which is not already in the occupation of the peasant proprietors; another, that labour is often insufficient in a country where labourers have their own lands to cultivate; and a third reason is, that however profitable indigo may be when bought at a price which does not remunerate the grower, the planter *can seldom make it pay* when he grows it on his own account.

The other systems of indigo cultivation are classified under the second head of *ryotee*, which means cultivation carried on by and at the risk of the ryots. This may be done in various ways. How it is done in Lower Bengal we have described. But indigo may be obtained from ryot cultivation in other ways which are quite unobjectionable. In North Bengal, for instance, the ryot

gets an advance, which he keeps whether the crop fails or not; and if there is a crop, he is paid a further sum according to an estimate made on the ground before it is cut. But, above all, under this system the account closes with the harvest, and there is no accumulation of bad debts running on from year to year. The contract is for the year, and the ryot is free to take or refuse another engagement for the next year.

In other places, indigo is grown like any other crop in any other part of the world, without a contract, but as a speculation on the part of the cultivator, who sells his crop to the planter at the market-rate, just as he sells his sugar-cane or his rice to the dealer.

But the plan which answers best, for every kind of produce in India, is for the manufacturer, planter, or trader, to make a contract with some native of substance, be he merchant or farmer, to deliver so much of the article by a certain date. The contractor takes advances, and makes his own arrangements with the cultivators. This system leads to no abuses, and answers perfectly. It is the one which the people of India thoroughly understand, and it is the one which should be pursued in the case of cotton as well as of indigo.

We must now proceed to show how the *ryotee* system of indigo cultivation suddenly collapsed. Throughout all these years of stifled discontent and anger on the part of the agricultural population, they seldom made their case known to the officials. In their dense ignorance of English principles and feelings, they took it for granted that the magistrates, whom they saw hunting and dining with the planters, would side with them in public as well as in private life. There was even an impression that the "Company" derived a profit from indigo cultivation. But of late years some light began to break in upon the darkness. Young natives, educated in English ideas of freedom and justice at our Calcutta colleges, came back to their native villages, and doubtless undeceived the peasantry here and there. The influential native press worked the subject. The immense rise of prices made the ryots more independent, or "impertinent," as a planter would say. Then came the lighted match which was to set all the combustible feelings of the people in a flame. In 1859, some ryots applied to the Hon. Ashley Eden, the magistrate of a district near Calcutta, for protection against a planter who was going to sow their lands with indigo. He passed the following order:—"Since the ryots can sow in their lands whatever crop they like, no one can, without their consent and by violence, sow any other crop;" and he ordered the police to see that no one interfered with their lands. The question of the propriety of this order was immediately brought before the Government in

this shape, viz., Whether on an *ex parte* allegation by a planter, that the ryots were under advances to him to grow indigo on their land, he was to have the right of entering on the land and sowing it, and to have the protection of the police in doing so. Mr. Eden's order was upheld by the Lieutenant-Governor, on the ground that it would be impossible for the police in every such case to know or to decide whether the ryot was under advances or not; and because to allow such a system was to allow the planter to sow what lands he chose, selecting, perhaps, the ryot's best land for a crop by which he would lose instead of gain. These orders led to the greatest excitement throughout the indigo districts. Until then the ryots had supposed that they had no power to refuse to enter into engagements to sow indigo. They now everywhere refused to sow, whether they were under engagement or not, and in some few instances threatened the planters with violence if they attempted coercion. What added still more to their feeling of independence was the Ryots' Magna Charta, Act X. of 1859, which we have already mentioned as confirming ryots' tenures, on certain conditions, and as putting an end to the power of the zemindar or planter to drag them to their houses and rent-offices at their own will and pleasure.

To protect the planters from sudden ruin, to give them time to adjust their arrangements to the altered state of things, and to quell the dangerous excitement which thus naturally and inevitably arose, Mr. Grant recommended the Legislative Council to pass a temporary Act, compelling all ryots who had received cash advances for the current season to sow indigo, under pain of fine and imprisonment. The Act was at once passed, and it provided at the same time for the appointment of a commission to inquire into the whole system of indigo cultivation, with a view to a careful consideration of the rights and grievances of all parties concerned. The result of the Act was twofold: hundreds of ryots went to prison rather than fulfil their engagements; and a valuable and exhaustive report on the whole system of indigo cultivation was produced by the commission. They sat from May to August, 1860, with open doors, inviting all classes to come forward and give evidence; and they examined 134 witnesses, including magistrates, missionaries, planters, zemindars, and ryots. The greatest interest was felt in the inquiry, and natives journeyed down in crowds from the Interior, in the hope of being allowed to give their testimony. The body of evidence, and the report upon it, are of great and permanent value, as having reference not only to indigo cultivation, but to the state of the police, the tenure of land, and the general condition of the country. From this report, most carefully and impartially drawn up, and from the voluminous mass of evidence annexed,

we have obtained a great part of the facts contained in this article. The member of the commission selected to represent the planting interest refused to sign the report, but alleged, as his reason for not doing so, rather its general tone than any absolute inaccuracy. Indeed, a separate minute which he signed, instead, confirms all the main conclusions of the report

But what conclusion did the Commission arrive at as to what was to be *done?* They came to this conclusion in the main, and the Lieutenant-Governor agreed with them, that if the planters wanted indigo, they must pay a price which would make it worth while to the ryot to bring it to them. On the other hand, the planting interest declared, with a shout of indignation, that the facts proved the necessity of a special law to protect them from the fraud and idleness of the ryots; that it was not enough to refer them to a civil law, which merely gave damages; they must have a law making all such breaches of contract a criminal offence, and obliging the ryot to work out his contract under penalty of going to prison. No, said Mr. Grant, in effect; your real difficulty is, that you cannot get the ryots to enter into engagements. It has been proved beyond a question that such engagements are only made under compulsion, and that you have roused by your proceedings a most dangerous spirit of anger among this hitherto peaceful people. In your own interest, to say nothing of the danger to the British Government, you must not make your system more unpopular than it is already. The Government cannot consent to enforce, by imprisonment and forced labour, contracts made under such circumstances. There is no special law for indigo in Madras, or in the North-Western provinces, or in Behar, yet there are no difficulties there; contracts for the supply are readily entered into, its cultivation being profitable. We will do everything to facilitate your recovery of advances by the existing civil law, with damages for any loss. We will introduce small-cause courts; we will multiply tribunals all over the districts where you live, to render swift and speedy justice to all parties. And all this the Government has done. A code of civil procedure has been passed by the Legislative Council, after some years of careful discussion, which has greatly improved and quickened the administration of justice. In addition to this, Mr. Grant has recommended a considerable number of Bills to the Legislative Council to enable the planters to realize their rents more readily from defaulters; to protect their indigo from cattle trespass by the ryots; to register before official persons all indigo contracts, with a view to prevent evasion on the one hand, and force on the other; to provide for the award of damages in a suit for rent, when the plaintiff has been forced into court unreasonably; and to provide against the planters being

dispossessed of lands which are their own. It must also be observed that the Act we have called the Ryots' Charter provided greatly increased facilities for the raising of the ryots' rents by the zemindar or planter, whenever by the nature of the tenure they are liable to be raised.

At an early period of the discussion, Mr. Grant called the attention of the planters to this power of raising rents as a legitimate means of compensating themselves, if obliged to abandon the indigo manufacture. Planters who hold zemindaree tenure, and who have failed in inducing the ryots to grow indigo, have taken the hint, and suits for the enhancement of rents have been instituted by hundreds. The ryots are naturally angry at this, and in some places they have combined against the payment of the enhanced rate, and sometimes, we believe, against the payment of any rent at all. It is not wonderful that they should proceed to extremes, and that, having been crushed for generations, they should at first turn their new-found liberty into licence. Formerly, they would not believe but that the Government required them to grow indigo for the planters. Now, they fancy that Government will second them in whatever resistance they make to the planters. The officers of Government, however, have been directed to take active steps to dispel this delusion; and we have no doubt but that peace and order will once more be restored to this fertile and populous territory. But in the meantime the gain will have been great; for instead of peace and order being founded on the oppression of the helpless many by the powerful few, it will be founded on justice to all classes, and on the prosperity of all.

We have thought it necessary to show in some detail that the Government of Bengal has not exhibited any disposition to turn a deaf ear to the just claims of the planting interest. If anything could diminish our sympathy with those planters who have suffered severe losses from the break-down of the false system in which they have been engaged, it would be the unscrupulous way in which individuals among them, and the local newspapers representing their interests, have vilified the Government and misrepresented facts. We have no hesitation in saying that neither Mr. Grant, nor any of the other officials of the Bengal Government, have shown the slightest hostility towards the planters. They have simply endeavoured to do justice to both planter and ryot. The necessities of the case obliged them to discourage a state of things which was a disgrace to the administration and to the English name. The charge of official jealousy towards the settlers completely broke down before the Indigo Commission. In truth, all the probabilities of the case lay the other way. The magistrate of an Indian district lives often for months together

beyond the reach of any one speaking his mother-tongue, surrounded by native subordinates, who he knows are leagued to deceive him at every step, without a soul to speak to who has one thought in common with himself. As he travels through his enormous district, he now and then comes across a "factory," with its English comforts, its "home-like" garden or park. He finds a hearty welcome from the jovial inmate, and an excellent dinner, over which they discuss the politics of the district, and he hears of all the rascalities of his host's rivals and enemies. The next day the fellow-exiles join a number of planters from other factories to engage in a tiger-hunt or pig-sticking expedition, which ends in another dinner, and still more confidential revelations of native rascality. Indeed, to have a planter in a district, if he is an honest man and a gentleman, is of the greatest possible advantage. He can give the magistrate the greatest assistance in detecting the rogueries of his police, the commission of hushed-up crimes, and on apprehending criminals. He is the only man whose word he can thoroughly depend upon, in a district as big as Yorkshire. Is it likely that, under such circumstances, Indian officials should everywhere show an inclination to thwart their "adventurer" countrymen, and side with the native peasantry against them? Admirable is Mr. Grant's remark on this subject: "As to the advantage of having English gentlemen, with the loyalty, courage, energy, perseverance, and skill, which is their patrimony, scattered over the country, it is impossible in general terms to rate the political and social value of this too highly. But it is only when these Englishmen are in relations of mutual benefit with the people of the country that their residence is of social or political advantage."

But the local press of Calcutta has dinned it into the ears of the planters that they are the victims of a cruel, selfish, and stupid bureaucracy. The *Times* has caught up the parrot-cry, and has from first to last copied into its own leaders the gross misrepresentations of these newspapers. Much mischief has fortunately not been done. The public in England are too ill-informed and too careless to pay much attention to any articles on Indian domestic questions which may appear in the *Times* or elsewhere. Lord Canning and Sir Charles Wood have emphatically pronounced Mr. Grant's conduct to have been marked by great firmness and judgment. Indeed, we think it was fortunate that during such a crisis the reins of government were in the hands of a man possessing Mr. Grant's moral courage and statesmanship.

Out of the furious party-feeling and war of classes to which these events gave rise, grew the episode of the *Nil Durpan*, which we have only space to allude to very cursorily.

The Rev. James Long, known to all Bengal as an indefatigable missionary among the poorer classes of the native community, an active promoter of a kind of "Useful Knowledge Society" for the publication of cheap works in the Bengali language, and an ardent enlightened philanthropist, had for many years devoted his special attention to the native press. He knew how extensive was its influence upon the native mind, and he constantly urged upon the Government the prudence of paying more attention to the character of the native newspapers and books which were so eagerly read by an essentially reading people. Five hundred and sixty-one thousand books and pamphlets were published in Calcutta alone during the year 1857. During the height of the indigo excitement, he came upon a native drama called the 'Indigo Mirror,' depicting the sufferings of the people at the hands of the planters. It was circulating largely, and was calculated, both from the subject and the character of the work, to intensify the prevailing excitement among the native community. He brought the book to the notice of the Secretary to the Bengal Government, Mr. Seton Karr, who agreed it was important that Englishmen should have the means of seeing the work, as an indication of genuine native feeling, of which we are always so dangerously ignorant. He therefore suggested to the Lieutenant-Governor that it should be translated, and Mr. Grant assented, but gave no instructions at the time as to what should be done when the translation had been completed, expecting to be further consulted. Mr. Long superintended the translation of the play, and had it printed. At the Secretary's office a list had always been kept of certain persons in England—leading statesmen, well-known philanthropists, and newspaper editors,—to whom it was customary to send all publications, of whatever kind, which the Bengal government printed from time to time, such as government blue-books, &c. Mr. Seton Karr, not understanding that the Lieutenant-Governor expected to be consulted again about this play, directed, as a matter of ordinary routine, that copies of the work should be sent to the persons on this list, and some of the copies were sent to editors in India. Directly these circumstances came to the knowledge of the Planters' Association, they interpreted the act as proving the hostility and prejudice of the Government against them, and thereupon determined to have their revenge by prosecuting Mr. Long for issuing a malicious libel, hoping thereby to bring down disgrace upon the Government that employed him in the work. In vain did the Lieutenant-Governor express his regret to the Association at the untoward mistake. They were determined to have their revenge. In England, the action would have been under Lord Campbell's Act, and have allowed of a plea of justification; but

this law has not been extended to India; so recourse was had to a criminal indictment.

At a time when the whole of the non-official community had been excited by the local press into believing that the Government were in a conspiracy to crush English enterprise and all non-officials, and in a community characterized by its intense hatred and contempt for the natives of the country, the jury was composed, with one exception, of English shopkeepers and traders. The judge, who had distinguished himself on previous occasions by *ad captandum* speeches from the bench, and by invectives against native vices, harangued the jury on the malice of the defendant; absurdly misrepresented passages in the play, so as to persuade the jury that they were obscene libels upon the countrywomen of the jury; went out of his way to attack the Government; and altogether made just such an address as a judge under the circumstances ought not to have made. The jury, of course, returned a verdict of *guilty;* and the judge, with much evident satisfaction, sentenced Mr. Long to a fine of 100*l.* and a month's imprisonment in the common gaol. We do not enter into further details on the subject of this trial, or the character of the play, as both have been very much noticed by the English press, and were commented on in three admirable letters which Mr. Godfrey Lushington addressed to the *Times* in October last.

The whole history of the proceeding, however, is one of numerous proofs of the extreme and peculiar difficulty which will always attend the administration of our Indian Government. In fact, the whole of this indigo dispute is a proof of that difficulty. The problem at issue is, how to rule an empire like India, which is at the same time both a military dependency and a colony. The principles on which it would be desirable to govern a colony of the ordinary kind, and a foreign dependency inhabited by a conquered nation and a half-civilized race, are obviously very different. The motto of the old Company was: We rule for the benefit of *the people of India;* and when they found the interests of the people of India clash with those of the colonists, they sacrificed the latter. Thirty years ago, however, all restrictions on the settlement of Englishmen in India were removed. If during that time India has not become an English colony, it is not because the Indian Government has thrown impediments in the way of English settlers. The narrative we have just given is a convincing proof that the officials of that Government were too often culpably lenient towards their own countrymen, when the latter were disposed to override the rights of the native population. The much-abused "old Indians" were not very far wrong when they denied that India could ever, from

the very nature of the case, be an English "colony" in the proper sense of the word.

Two things are essential to success in colonization,—labour and land; but the European planter, settler, or landlord in India can seldom find the two things together. In the waste and unoccupied lands, there are no labourers; and where there are labourers, the land is theirs, and therefore not available for the European. To import labourers into the waste and hilly land, to clear it and to cultivate it, is a work demanding not only capital, but time. And time is always grudged by the European settler in India. If he goes to Canada or Australia, he does so with the purpose of making it his own home, and the home of his descendants. He can rear a healthy, vigorous, energetic offspring. If he goes to India, he does so with the determination not to live there a single day after he has reached the precise number of pounds sterling which he considers necessary for the London house or country villa. He can neither rear nor educate his family in India; and if he thought there was any probability of ending his days there, he would never go there at all. With such feelings, the Indian settler lives a life of irritation and impatience against everybody and everything that delays the day of his return. He hates alike both the population and the Government, for the interests of the former and the scruples of the latter retard his object. With such a temper, he never will win the attachment of the native population: he is in too great a hurry to try conciliation; he cannot wait to lead them—he must drive them.

There must always be, therefore, more or less, a clashing of interests and feelings between the two races, and whenever the Government or its subordinates attempt to do impartial justice between the two, we must expect to have an outcry from the settlers that they are being sacrificed to bureaucratic prejudices and class jealousy. Instead of diminishing, the difficulty will probably increase as the spread of wealth and education create a greater feeling of self-respect, independence, and national pride in the native mind.

We do not say that the European settler and the native population can never work together in a friendly spirit and with mutual advantage. We know many cases where English zemindars, farmers, and talookdars have held their position with equal advantage to themselves and to the people on their estates; but this was because they happened to be men of benevolence and high principles, and who had not thought it waste of time to study native character, the native language, and native interests. It is not likely, however, that the majority of settlers will be men of this stamp; and India will always need a paternal and des-

potic government to do justice to the rival and contending races with a strong hand.

The two great measures which have just been passed—the redemption of the land-tax and the sale of waste lands—may do much to increase the wealth of India and the prosperity of England, and to strengthen our hold over our eastern empire. But the realization of those objects must ever depend on the extent to which we carry the immense population with us, on the extent to which we make them share with us in our success, and on the justice and consideration with which we rule over the masses. The problem of government there is utterly unlike anything that the world's history can present; and the Indian Government can only do their difficult task in a way that shall redound to the honour and the safety of our country and our faith by the cordial support of public opinion at home.

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